

Memorial Day - Charles Lawrence

around the Irish clatter

Early Sunday morning, right after breakfast, while the ~~noise~~ of early kitchen noises was the main sound around the house, my grandfather would be out cutting the largest⁺ peony buds, the lushes⁺ branches of lilacs and shafts of bleeding hearts dripping their delicate pink blossoms. He would put ~~them all~~ ^{bundles of them} in pails and set them in the shade of the old astikan apple tree. The tree itself, ~~was~~ too old to blossom but it was something ^{for} against which an old bench ^{to lean against} was placed. ~~It made a nice place to sit.~~

Then grandfather and I would go to church. ~~In~~ preparation for this event ~~my~~ grandmother put out my best pants and a jacket and a clean shirt. ~~I would wear one of grandfather ties with the long end tucked inside my shirt. I would also have to have my shoes shined to take the shoes off of the toes, and all of the shoe shining equipment was kept in the bottom of the kitchen cabinets, and it always smelled of shoe polish.~~ ^{and} ^{worn} ^{would be} ^{socks} Grandfather would supervise my shoe shining, Grandmother would supervise my face, ears, fingernails and knees washing.

The church was ~~a block~~ two blocks away. I would walk at grandfather side, sometimes carrying his bible. We walked in a dignified way down the front walk and up the street, grandfather frowning at ~~these streets~~ ^{hosed} walks that had not been swept and grass that had not been swept up from recent cuttings, ~~and~~ ^{also} but otherwise not noticing anything either left or right. ^{then shaded} The street always seemed especially attractive to me,

There were perhaps twenty ^hhoses between our house and the church, each with a large lawn ~~and~~ trees and shrubs, one or two with a decorative lawn planter ^{crowded with} ~~full of~~ begonias. No one on the street took in roomers and only one or two, in those days, had been divided into ^{flats} ~~a~~ apartments. ~~There were several flats.~~ ^{walk}

The sunny days were wonderful days for those houses. The sides ~~would be covered~~ ^{sterilized} with leafy shadows and outlines and even those that were not freshly painted

were unigly part of a plot of land that ~~somehow~~ each house had a way of possessing. Each was two stories tall with a ^{hip} ~~flat~~ roof and a fancy cornice and, at the time that I first got to know them, which was shortly after the first world war, they were only forty years old. They had verandas, most of them, that went around two sides. Each house sat back from the sidewalk at least thirty feet with fifty or so between them. Their clapboards were ^a straight, not warped ^{from} with foundation settling as some of them are now. It was before the time of artificial brick and stone ^{work} each house appeared to be what it was, manmade and slightly affected, ^{but not artificial.} Since few of the families had maids housekeeping was ^{craft} ~~an art~~ and I am afraid that there was little gracious living. There was ^(in a large galvanized iron washbasin with a red handle) busy, scrubbing, cooking, ash shaking and carrying out, washing and ^{clothes and shades} mending and sewing and dusting and polishing and blind pulling down to keep the ~~furniture~~ upholstery and rug in the parlor from fading and conserving of goods and canning. There was not much budgeting since most people bought ^{with kept in silver bowls, cans, envelopes drawers,} on cash ~~terms and what there was was what people~~ had. There was security in the walk with grandfather to the church, since ~~somehow~~ this was another orderly way to live and be and it did not occur to grandfather that there was any other way, nor to me either.

The church, built slightly after the neighborhood, was of granite, not grey but brownish, modeled ~~generally~~ after the ^{style of} ~~architecture~~ set by post offices and small town rail road stations and banks. Grandfather always sat in his own particular place. The minister sat in front dressed in a frock coat on a raised platform and behind him peeping over an handsome ^{golden oak} ~~wooden~~ sort of half partition was the choir ^{heads visible, all in a row,} and behind them, rising in ^{athletic majesty} ~~impressive majesty~~ the pipes of the organ. Now, on revisiting, the church seems small, but in those days it was the largest space I had ever been in, except for the ^{national guard} armory which I

and
had visited once. The organ music was far and away the loudest noise I had ever heard, perhaps not the loudest, but certainly the most enveloping noise. The deep tones of the base pipes, got inside me, and made me feel from time to time that I and the room must surely burst apart. But grandfather sat quietly, resisting my small panic. The sermons I do not remember, though I remember standing where the minister stood one Sunday on childrens day and leading the congregation in the lords Prayer which I did not know beyond the first two lines, but it made no difference because everyone else seemed to and it went on the the finish without me. But I do remember that grandfather kept track of the text used by the minister in his sermon, writing the date and the name of the minister in the margin, taking great delight when he found one text being overdone, or ministers that seemed to draw conflicting meanings from a text. Years later I came across Grandfathers Bible among his effects and noted with surprise how many parts of the bible had, in all the thirty years grandfather kept his records, never been used, as the basis of any sermon.

In church I was never given anything to play with or distract me from my boredom. and I was bored and the seats were hard, and when I was older I never joined a church that did not have cushions and I became conscious often that the weave in my pants was making a pattern on my behind, but I would not wriggle or turn around or get up on my knees and look over the back of the pews. Perhaps this is why I liked the hymns because it gave us a chance to stand up, and although grandfather could not carry a tune, I gathered from the words that there was something important going on here. I didn't understand it but I gathered that this was not very important. I felt part of an important ceremonial thing going on in our community and this was the only time I every saw most of the people in all the houses together, dressed up and not busy.

Grandfather was not amusing. This is not to say he was unpleasant.
He was just not full of ^{the} witty ^{sayings} things to say that ~~it~~ later became
aware that grandfathers were supposed to be. ^{full of} On the way home he might
say, "Well, I wonder what your grandmother had for dinner." Or he might
say, "I didn't think much of the sermon." Or he did, ^{more rarely, think much of the sermon.} Or he might talk a little
about his garden in which he ~~never~~ ^{never} worked ~~on Sunday~~ ^{on Sunday} or he might observe
some matter of fact thing about the people we passed on the street ^{who} ~~which~~
were not many. Usually we were all going in the same direction on Sunday
either to or from church, and we walked at respectable distances from each other
in quiet twosomes or threesomes. If we passed five people in a group
^{coming toward us} they were likely to be Catholics and grandfathers greeting was noticeable
restrained as though our directions were not only ^{different} ~~geographical~~ ^{different} ~~geographical~~ but in all
probability eternally.

Sunday dinner was a glorious thing: a clean ^{starched}
tablecloth, the silver set out in an orderly way with the napkins all
^{tightly} ~~properly~~ ^{silver} rolled in their rings, Grandfather the most impressive of all
because it was guarded by an eagle with red jewel eyes. His also was
the chair with arms, and, at the other end, near the kitchen, grandmothers ^{without}
The dining room had a plate rack, on which, at neat intervals, were plates
with pictures on them, a carving on a piece of coal of a coal mine,
a plate that said Pan American Exposition with a picture of President
McKinley. ^{made} The only addition to the collection I can remember over the years
was a plate that had a picture of an airplane with the numbers NX211
which was the number on "Lindys plane". It was not ^a ~~pretty~~ ^{collection} but it was
interesting, especially the coal mine. In the corner ~~of the room~~ was
a curved china cabinet with the good plates in it, and the good glass
ware and the crystal vases and the serving dishes that had been part of
great grandfathers golden wedding anniversary gifts. We never used them
except at ^{Easter and when evangelists visiting the church stayed with} Thanksgiving. They were being saved.

In a ceremonial way, Sunday dinner was great grandfathers. He was a man in good clothes and a mustash, smelling of shaving lotion who treated his son and daughter in law in the intimate manner reserved for servants. But there was a certain grandeur to him. Dinner began about ten minutes after he came home from church services at the Baptist church, not the Methodist church where grandfather and I went. This separation had come about from some church feud which I never understood and which had nothing to do with theology. But great grandfather, before I was up for breakfast, would have set out for church with his gold watch chain and his elegator ~~handles~~ carved ivory handled cane not to return until several minutes after we had come home. The sight of him coming down the avenue was a signal for lively activity in the kitchen with grandmother warming and taking out of the oven and grandfather carrying in his vest and shirt sleeves. After great grandfather died we stopped on the way home from church at a corner store, not like the New York and big city corner stores but a store that was more like a neatly maintained cottage, to buy a newspaper-- but great grandfather didn't abide with funny papers and saw no need for news.

That it was grandfather's house was indicated only by the fact that he sat in the chair with the arms on it. ^{Great} Grandfather ^{paying} sat more or less like a guest, commenting on the food with the assurance of a man who had the right to be objective, and more than once I can recall my grandmother biting her lip at some comment Great grandfather made about the texture of the chicken gravy or the lumps in the squash. But most of all the recollection of dinner recalls the grace. This was a ceremonial thing and by watching out from under my eyes while grandfather and ~~grand~~ great grandfather bowed their heads with their eyes closed I could see grandmother making a last check of the table

deciding what she must rush out to the kitchen to get as soon as the amen came. But for grandfather and great grandfather, the grace was a pack. It was the only point at which they mentioned love for each other or the world at large. Whatever connection our house had with any thing that we could not see on our street was summed up in the grace. In this act the food got sanctified and we were all dedicated. The purpose of it was never clear but somehow there was something as personal about it as the china closet and there was storing up of something that Grandfather felt he could call on later I am sure. What great grandfather thought I am not at all sure, but I think it was ^{clearly} ~~probably~~ something that he had been brought up to have respect for.

He was a curious man, a sentimental, pompous man with repeat misty for himself. So badly did he want a girl when my grandfather was born that he had named grandfather Burr D. Livermore because he had planned to name his daughter Birdie. Grandfather never recovered from this and all his life acted as though he was a bit of a disappointment to people, emancipating himself only by dint of holding onto opinions very strongly and without any particular talent.

Great grandfather and I sat opposite to each other on the sides of the table. ~~He was a curious man, a sentimental, pompous man~~ That I kept quiet was not because I was afraid to talk but because in the midst of this vaguely grand situation I could not think of anything quite worthy to say. Dinner was quiet, but grandmother ~~wanted~~ interrupted each quiet passing of the dishes with the question "Is everything all right." And usually she got her reward ~~when~~ when ~~grandfather~~ Great grandfather would roll up his napkin and pronounce the dinner satisfactory. This did not please grandmother so much because she could feel that she had satisfied great grandfather as because this was the sign that he was feeling well and contented enough to make no more trouble but sit on the front porch and smoke

his cigar contently by himself, thus releasing the ~~happy~~ rest of his family to go its own way. If he did not pronounce this particular benediction it meant he was in a poor humor and when he was in a poor humor no one was left untouched by the tension his bad humor could create.

With the ceremonies ^{After} dinner concluded Grandfather setting about the business of clearing the table, looking perhaps a little wistfully at the table as though there should be something else to say or do, then servant like go about the cleaning up, and grandfather, once again in his shirt sleeves and vest, would go out on the back porch and gather up the pails of flowers, wrap them all in careful cones of newspapers. I would help by looking earnest and concerned for the blossoms lest they be crushed. Once wrapped, grandfather would put on his coat, ~~and~~ grandmother would come to the door and *we would gather our bundles up, quietly and* watch us go up the lane. Grandfather with his bundles and I with my curiosity and the sense of company.

Fort Hill Cemetery was a couple of miles away, ~~deep~~ past downtown and a few blocks past the county court house and the post office. The town was opposite end to; that part of the city that once was fashionable now was shabby but the public buildings and the cemetery had been ~~laid out~~ laid out ~~when~~ before new fashions came. When I went with grandfather he would take a street car, a little twenty eight passenger affair that bounced along with some of the *creating an* illusion of of carriage that ~~somehow~~ had eluded its horses. Though downtown we would glide and out the other side of the store section to a quiet street corner where, as you alighted from the street car, *you* could see, at the end of the side street opposite, the stone arch entrance to the cemetery, like the gate of an old walled city.

Decorating the graves was an enterprise ~~for~~ which I shared with
grandfather in which we both ~~perhaps~~ felt free. I remember ~~and~~
a place where the drive wound up around the top of a ledge
while ~~from~~ from one lip of the edge to the other there was an
even ^{grassy} path that dipped down and up in a cressent ^{an inverted} ~~and~~; it was runn
to run it giving oneself to gravity and coasting up the opposite side.
The ~~up~~ ^{near} the top of Fort Hill there was the iron fenced in area
where grandfathers aunt and uncle were buried. Near the bottom of the
slope in a flat space Great Grandmother was buried and for the space
in front of ^{her} the tomb stone Grandfather reserved the best of the flowers.
There seemed to be among the keepers of the graves a tendency to
borrow flower holders for grandfather was always searching for
the ^{ones} ~~ones~~ that belonged to our graves, and muttering and scowling
about the neighbors who robbed them of their decorations. Scattered
throughout the cemetery were ~~the~~ water faucets. ~~and~~ Grandfather
would first go to the graves gather up the pots and the metal cones with
the spike in the bottom, carry them in a bundle to the water faucets,
and wrince them out, filling them with fresh water, and here came in my
only ^{help} ~~service~~ ^{but help} ~~or we would~~ carry them, brim full, from the faucets
back to the graves where grandfather would sort out the blossoms in
appropriate piles, emphasising in each boquey the blossoms thought
to be the favorites of those who rested there, lilacs for the aunt
and uncle and bleeding hearts ~~and~~ for his mother.

One the way home from the ^{graves and near the stone arch entrance} cemetery we would
pass a monument that was distinguished from all the others for its
size and plainness. It was a simple obelisk ^{was as high as a man} related to nothing
else in the cemetery though not in any way discordant from it. Iⁱⁿ
many ways it was the most eloquent of all, not part of any row but

especially solitary and especially silent. I remember the spring
we came to the cemetery after I learned to read ^{and} found that
there were words carved in the weathered marble. WHO IS THERE TO
WEEP FOR LOGAN.

"Who is Logan Grampa?"

"Logan, Logan was an Indian."

"What does that mean Grampa?"

"A long time ago Logan was an Indian chief
and he lived near here. But he was driven out and his family was
killed. Who is there to weep for Logan? is something he said after
that happened. He meant that there was no one to weep for him with
all his family killed." Who is there to weep for Logan. Nothing
even since that time has ever seemed so desolate.

Life with grandfather was always a little like going to the cemetery, there were always flowers being put on tombstones, the past was revered with a tenacity that was not without disappointment. The roots of the family were not in the small town in which I knew them but in a village eighty miles away in the hilly country in the south eastern part of the state. Beyond that and farther back was legend, all carefully reported in a book that no one in my immediate family has ever read. There in the ~~hilly~~ hilly land

Time
that brought riches to some families, during the civil war from the trading of horses and to others by means of the hard training it imposed on its young there lived the poor ancestors of families still poor and other now famous among the rich of the nation. There in the chancy speculation with futures, some men ~~made~~ made the choices that produced great fortunes, others chose the land and ~~disappeared~~ their descendants disappeared into the respectable middle classes of large cities. People always were leaving the villages and the

Others stayed poor
towns, moving on to other towns and on from there to cities. From *obscure villages in which my great grandfather was invisible* the county from which my family came there came also the L. C. Smiths who manufactured typewriters, and the Franklins who named and automobile *one whose name was on an automobile (was subject)* and the Rockefeller from a little ways away. There were *a famous politician who then became a governor* Butterfields and Lucks who made their name in education and politics. These were the names that related our family to the events of my grandfather's century, and their progress was the progress Grandfather took into account. To him ~~the~~ the world was Hartford mills, Center Lysle, Michigan hill and then people who had grown up there and gone out from there to become famous.

Grandfather's yearning for the life of the small town was shared by many others, who came from there and one of the

meaningful events was the Reunions ~~that~~ periodically occurred during
old home week, when the half dozen families still remaining in
Hartford mills would call the ^{cousins} ~~kins~~ together. I do not recall
the details, but I do remember the trip in the chevrolet, the picnic in
the church yard, the visiting to the cemetery, the service in the
church, which now was not used for regular services and need a new
roof, the experience of distance among the families that came there,
some with chauffeurs, one with a wife who would not leave the car but
must be fed by the chauffeur, the hearty farm families, a second cousin ^(or third)
whose immaculate living room smelled ^{nicely} of kerosene, Summer Winter Spring
and Fall. We were welcome and glad to be there and there was friendship
and talk of old times in the shade of trees my father had played under
on his boyhood visits and trees my greatgrandfather had planted.
But there was also a finality in the sense that each visit was ^{only one} a final
day in a lifetime, the town could never be put together again, would
never be as good again. The church would never be so white and
straight again, the graves never again be fresh. All that remains from
generation to generation among us
is a pull back to the land, a yearning for roots and
a sense of place, and identification with some source. Will this be
lost? Is it a cultural thing that disappears from living bones when
placeless rootless
the apartment and the suburb has consumed all the children, and like
Logan there is none left to weep for all the past and all the suffering
and all the injustice, endured by mothers and children and men who
worked and died and left nothing but their children. And is
this what people seek in the suburbs with their ^{what they want to see} talk about their children.
and ~~the~~ and is this the source of the disillusionment---

I was old enough to watch a home being destroyed, put in packing boxes, piled in a truck and moved away. The comfortable chair in which I had been nursed became just something on the back of a truckman and it never looked the same in any other place. The windows through which I had seen lightning for the first time and through which the rolling sound of thunder shook were looked ^{Veronal for} ~~thought~~ or the last time as I watched the truck pull away. There were the cracks in the sidewalk I had learned to skate around, the humps in the walks from the elm roots, and the naked windows and the bare room in which I had lived and that was the end of Auburn.

There was no welcome in Rochester. For the first time I saw streets where people lived without trees and wide factory streets that were not main streets. It was rainy when we moved into a house in Rochester, and I crept to a window in the attic and looked out on a city for the first time that was not my city and down whose street I would never walk with my grandfather, and somehow there was another world that I did not know and suddenly I was grown up in a different world around me. I was homesick.

I suspect that to my parents I was a big disappointment. ^{since the war (first W.W.)} They were together for the first time but suddenly there was age about them also, for they were not merely transplanted from one familiar locus to another but from one world to another. My father came to it not as a city to be transformed by his personality but ^{the city} ~~as a~~ ^{but} as an inhabitant to make out within it. We borrowed a rug from a second cousin for the dining room and a couch for the living room. And what was perhaps for them a big adventure died in my heart and partly in theirs. It was merely a city and we were better off than many for there was ^{our} employment and my parents were past their ^{own} generation.

The lady who lived upstairs (n there was always someone upstairs) was a nice lady who played valencia on her electric phonograph which was the loudest thing I had ever heard outside of a church. Down the street was the ball park for the international League team of Red Wings, beyond that a small park with paths in and out of the bushes and beyond that the school. Kindergartden and the first grade in auburn had beenn impressive but small, the sand box, the circle on the ^{waxed} floor arround which we sat, the ptotted flowers, the curtains in the principals office. I learned to write with a pen and playwith other kids in the yard.

These were very intimate things. There was no trouble except when, once on the way home in winter, I piked with a stick at an old robins nest in a small pine tree in the front yard of a strangers house and a strange lady (it was ~~in~~ two blocks away from where we lived) came out and gave me a very bad scolding, threatening at the end to have the police come and get me. I ran all the way home and hid -- too frightened to tell anyone of the crime I had committed. The fact is that many things inflicted on children by waysof punishment went far beyond wyhat was needed, but there was in the small town a conviction that the eveil of childr^n went deep into their ould and that it was necessary to frighten children to their very ~~bones~~ marrow to obtain the proper responce. It was because of this that I began going home another way, pst a family of Foots house. Therewas a foot girl in our class in kindergarted, a delightful and sweet little girl of no particular individuality, whom I played with in school for a whole yearnbefore she tole me that she was colored. Going her way I walked with her sometimes and once I may have called her Nigger, or someone else may have I can't remember, but she sat crying on the curbstone, and would not be consolded. It was the first time I remember seeing anyone cry except for being hit and it made an impression, wich I recall mainly for its latter

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On the way
implications. ~~From there~~ home I passed a house where a prison guraed lived
sith a wife who was an invalid but who sat day after day in a shed that
extened to the walk, weaving rugns on a loom that was the most *gradal*
machinery I had ever seen. *children said* By some of the ~~hids~~ she was thought to be a witch
but to me she was a wonderul shadowy lady who day after day allowed me to
through the square that window
look in ~~ana~~ a mystical world of ~~activity~~ production, like nothing so
much as pictures of santa Clause workshop and the animated activities
of christmas windows in fancy department stores.

But school in Rochester and the walks home
were not like this. The children were in groups and *into* small gangs,
and each prided itself on being tougher than the other but none of
them were very tough. But they were frightening enough to make me long
badly to belong to one of them. In the Spring they layed a game with
sharp pointed sticks which they drove into the ground like daggers,
harder than I could and if their stick did something heroic they
had the right to bat your stick off as far as they could, and I seemed
always to be chasing stick dog like until I gave up the game and invented my own.
I could run and hide and did and in the never never land of the park bushes
I would hide, indian like, dropping clues only when my followers thereatened
to give up the search and abandon me to ~~the~~ my own game. But it was no
fun.

I dont know if it was the knickers, the indifference
of the school teachers or my own frail ego and insecurity but schooo
was not a great experience for me. A nice girl that sat opostieme
was carted away in a froth of epilepsy and somehow in her awkwardness
there was all the awkwardness. There was no dignity to life, my own or otherw
and we were part of a city, and I never knew where my teacher lived or
or where
when she died. ~~where I would go if I was I was~~